UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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F R I D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

* Secretary-General condemns overthrow of Comoros Government by mercenary group; calls for immediate return to democratic ways.

* United Nations should not be mere instrument of power perpetuation for rich Members, Malaysia tells General Assembly.

* India says United Nations must assume Charter duties to supervise and coordinate global economic policies.

* Debt service hinders reform and exacerbates poverty in many developing countries, Zambia states.

* UNHCR welcomes progress towards political settlement in former Yugoslavia, but says millions of people will still need humanitarian aid this winter.

* UNRWA and UNHCR urge Libya and Middle East States to find solution to Palestinian refugee crisis.

* International Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia says policy of prosecuting political and military leaders for war crimes has given it credibility.

* Elisabeth Rehn of Finland is appointed Special Rapporteur on human rights in former Yugoslavia.

* WHO reports outbreaks of dengue and dengue haemorrhagic fever in 12 Latin American and Caribbean countries.

* DPI provides wide range of services during fiftieth session of General Assembly.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today expressed deep shock on learning that a group of mercenaries had overrun the democratically-elected

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Government of the Comoros and was holding President Said Mohamed Djohar hostage. Strongly condemning the use of force as a means of changing the government of any country, he called for the earliest possible release of the hostages and the return of the Comoros to democratic ways.

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Prime Minister Mahathir Bin Mohamad of Malaysia today expressed his Government's support for the United Nations, but said the tendency to make it an instrument of the rich and powerful should be corrected. In an address to the General Assembly, he said the "narrow national interest of the few is still what the UN is all about." The victors of 1945 had clung tenaciously to the levers of power. The Security Council, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had become mere instruments of power perpetuation, while the Charter was "more honoured in its violations than its adherence."

The Prime Minister criticized the way in which the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty had been pushed through only to be followed by the testing of nuclear weapons by some major powers. He called for an immediate end to testing and the total elimination of nuclear arsenals. He went on to say that the lesson learned from the situations in Rwanda, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia and Chechnya was that no international order would be defended unless the major powers saw their vital interests at risk. He also criticized Third World leaders who had led their own people down the path of despair and misery following decolonization.

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The United Nations must assume its Charter responsibilities to supervise and coordinate global economic policies, Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee told the Assembly today. He said development strategies, poverty alleviation, debt and resource transfers were burning issues for developing countries; if the Organization ignored them, it would not serve the needs of its membership. In the World Trade Organization (WTO), efforts had been made to link trade to environmental and labour standards. Meanwhile, the World Bank had warned against the proliferation of protectionist demands. If there was a genuine interest in protecting the environment and labour interests in developing countries, why were the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) being sidelined? he asked.

The Foreign Minister also highlighted the problem of terrorism, to which democracies, as open societies, were particularly vulnerable. Citing the recent murder of a Norwegian tourist in India, he said an "empire of terror" was being built up with arms and money sent across borders. The United Nations must speak about terrorism in forthright terms. Terrorism was destructive of peace and democracy because terrorism was war by other means, he concluded.

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The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Zambia, Christon Tembo, told the Assembly that the United Nations required a new vision for the next 50 years. As long as there was a proliferation of weapons, there could never be genuine international peace and security, he said. The resumption of nuclear testing by certain states was not in the spirit of nuclear non-proliferation. Further disarmament measures were needed, especially with regard to land-mines.

Poverty in many developing countries was exacerbated by the cost of servicing debt, which should be reduced, the Foreign Minister continued. For the poorest countries, debt-service ratios should be reduced to 21 per cent of export earnings. The challenge now was to move away from concerns of stabilization and liberalization to stimulation of production, employment and labour productivity. He stressed that domestic reform efforts could only be sustained by generous debt reduction. The debt overhang remained the single most important barrier to recovery and development in Zambia.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Sadako Ogata, today welcomed the progress being made towards a political settlement in the former Yugoslavia. However, she warned that millions of people would remain dependent on humanitarian aid this winter. UNHCR was currently assisting 3.5 million people in the region, including almost 420,000 people forced from their homes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia since early July.

Mrs. Ogata urged the international community to ensure that respect for human rights and humanitarian principles -- including the right of refugees to return home -- were included in any discussions on an overall peace plan. Such provisions were crucial for a sustainable peace and recovery in the region, she stressed.

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The heads of two United Nations agencies today urged Libya and States in the Middle East to redouble their efforts to resolve the current crisis facing Palestinian refugees being expelled from Libya or forced to live in desert camps. In a joint statement, the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Ilter Turkmen, and UNHCR Sadako Ogata called on the governments concerned to exercise compassion and restraint in handling the matter.

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The policy of prosecuting political and military leaders who ordered or failed to punish war crimes has given the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia credibility, according to the President of the Tribunal, Antonio Cassese. However, in a report issued today, he stated that the Tribunal still faced three problems which, in addition to its financial problems, could greatly limit its effectiveness and slow down the pace of its action.

First, the Tribunal had no enforcement agencies and relied on the cooperation of States. Regrettably, some States had not cooperated, including the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), nor had some de facto authorities such as the self-styled Republics of Krajina and Srpska. The second problem related to the limitations inherent in an international criminal jurisdiction trying offenses committed in a distant country. The Tribunal did not command police officers who could be sent quickly to the scene of a crime. Instead, it had some 80 staff to investigate many perpetrators who had a great many offenses.

The third problem, the report continued, was that the International Tribunal had been established in the midst of an armed conflict. At Nuremberg and Tokyo, the war had ended and many criminals had been captured. By contrast, the Tribunal had to deal with high-ranking planners and perpetrators of war crimes who could take shelter from prosecution under the umbrella of military or political power. Responding to criticism that only Serbs had been indicted so far, the report said the Tribunal did not prosecute members of ethnic groups, but individuals accused of grave crimes.

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The United Nations Commission on Human Rights has appointed Elisabeth Rehn of Finland as Special Rapporteur on human rights in the former Yugoslavia. Tadeusz Mazowiecki of Poland resigned as Special Rapporteur in July, having served the Commission since 1992.

Ms. Rehn is currently a Member of the European Parliament. She served as Finland's Minister for Defence from 1990 to 1994, and as Minister for Equality Affairs from 1991 to 1994. During her term as Defence Minister, Ms. Rehn became well acquainted with United Nations peace-keeping missions and their host countries during official visits to the Middle East and the Balkans.

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Since January, more than 140,000 cases of dengue have been reported by the authorities in 12 Latin American and Caribbean countries, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). In addition, more than 3,600 cases of the

more serious dengue haemorrhagic fever (DHF) have been recorded, along with 38 deaths.

The current outbreak is likely to become the most serious in the Americas since 1981, when Cuba experienced the hemisphere's first DHF epidemic, the WHO warned. At that time, 116,000 individuals were hospitalized over a 3-month period and more than 10,000 cases of DHF were confirmed, resulting in 158 deaths.

Dengue and DHF are transmitted by the bite of the Aedes aegypti mosquito and can cause illness ranging from fever to severe and fatal haemorrhages. Dengue is endemic in 100 countries worldwide, putting 2.5 billion people at risk. Of the 50 million cases which occur annually, 500,000 are hospitalized and 1 to 5 per cent die.

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The Department of Public Information (DPI) is providing a wide range of services for the media during the fiftieth session of the General Assembly. Special events during the session include the visit of Pope John Paul II on 5 October and the fiftieth anniversary special commemorative meeting from 22 to 24 October.

The DPI produces daily press releases in English and French on the work of the General Assembly plenary, the six Main Committees, the General Committee and the Credentials Committee. The Daily Highlights is prepared by the Central News Section and issued as a press release, and can be accessed through the Internet via the United Nations World Wide Web home page. The address is: http://www.un.org.

The Department provides daily news reports in English, French and Spanish via the United Nations News Audio Information System, and coverage of various meetings, briefings and conferences on United Nations Television.

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Israel calls on Syria and Lebanon to stop hesitating over Middle East peace process; says it expects Palestinians to become democratic and prosperous and to fight terrorism.

* Cambodia tells General Assembly it now enjoys peace, freedom and democracy; highlights need for continued international support to deal with land-mine problem.

* Philippines says United Nations peace-keeping operations must not be reformed at expense of development activities; calls for global conference on international migration.

* Secretary-General, in message for World Habitat Day, says challenge of building safe, healthy and productive human settlements begins at neighbourhood level.

* Appeals Chamber upholds jurisdiction of International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia in challenge by first defendant.

* ICFY Co-Chairman and United States Ambassador to Croatia invite Croatian Government and Serb representatives to meeting tomorrow to discuss question of Sector East.

* Fight against international terrorism should be carried out in conformity with international law, Spain tells Legal Committee.

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The Foreign Minister of Israel, Shimon Peres, today told the General Assembly that his country had fulfilled all its commitments regarding peace with Egypt and Jordan, freedom and democracy for the Palestinians, and regional economic cooperation. He called on Syria and Lebanon to look at that record and to stop hesitating. Experience had shown that by negotiating on all levels, without timidity or fatigue, peace could be achieved. Israel wanted to join all the countries of the Middle East in a new age for the good of their people.

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The choice was before every country to become free, prosperous and democratic, the Foreign Minister continued. He expressed the hope that the richer countries in the Middle East would help the more needy ones. The greatest danger was a combination of high technology and deep hatred, of modern instruments and feudalistic views. Israel expected the Palestinians to become democratic and prosperous, and to fight violence and terrorism. What was happening in the Middle East was a revolution. The distinction was no longer ideological or religious, it was between an old backward economy and one based on technology and science. Peace in the Middle East could not remain a peace between leaders, it had to become a peace between people, he concluded.

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The Foreign Minister of Cambodia, Ung Huot, today thanked the United Nations for its contribution to the peace process in his country, and paid homage to the peace-keepers who had died there. In an address to the General Assembly, he said Cambodia now enjoyed peace, freedom and democracy. He noted that steps were being taken to improve the human rights situation there, and expressed support for the presence and the work of the United Nations Centre for Human Rights.

Cambodia was in the process of consolidating peace, security and stability, which were the necessary conditions for development and nation-building, he said. It was working closely with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to ensure that the process of rehabilitation and transition to a market economy was well under way. Despite some difficulties immediately after the elections, very encouraging progress had been achieved. A growth rate of 7 per cent was targeted for the period 1995-1997. However, poverty was still a major problem, particularly in rural areas, and Cambodia would need continued international support to become a land-mine-free country.

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The Foreign Secretary of the Philippines, Domingo Siazon, today said that while economic liberalization had been almost universally embraced as a catalyst for development, many countries had resorted to inventive measures of disguised protectionism. He noted that labour shortages in resource-rich and rapidly industrializing economies had induced large-scale migrations of workers. Their presence in foreign lands made them vulnerable, and international cooperation was needed to protect their rights and dignity as human beings. He called on all States to ratify the Convention on the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and called for a United Nations-sponsored global conference on international migration.

Turning to the United Nations, he said peace-keeping operations should not be reformed at the expense of development activities. The Philippines supported the idea of streamlining multilateral development institutions and programmes. However, as Chairman of the Group of 77, it could not accept moves to abolish the development agencies in the name of division of labour or comparative advantage. The international community must augment the resources for those agencies, as well as the Bretton Woods institutions, not reduce them. He deplored the position of some States which refused to raise their contributions to international financial institutions, while preventing others from doing so in order to maintain their dominant role in those bodies.

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The challenge of building human settlements which are safe, stable, healthy and productive begins at the neighbourhood level, according to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In a message on the occasion of World Habitat Day, he said women and men must work together in solidarity to build cities from the bottom up. That was the way to improve housing, services and employment opportunities.

"It is in our neighbourhoods where we learn to share a common locality, form social bonds and take responsibility for the impact of our actions on others," he continued. "It is in our neighbourhoods that we develop the sense of tolerance and solidarity that brings with it friendship, self-confidence and faith in our fellow human beings. The neighbourhood is the threshold between the family and the society at large."

The Secretary-General expressed the hope that at the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul next June, the international community would commit itself through tangible programmes and affordable strategies to support a truly worthwhile undertaking: to help men, women and children to build a better world for themselves.

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The Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia today unanimously upheld the Tribunal's jurisdiction in the case against its first defendant, Dusko Tadic. The decision of the five-member Chamber cleared the way for the case to proceed towards trial later this autumn.

In a motion filed with the Trial Chamber in June, Mr. Tadic challenged the authority of the Tribunal on three grounds: he claimed that it had been unlawfully established; that it had been improperly given primacy over

national courts; and that it lacked authority to judge offences committed in the course of civil wars. The Trial Chamber rejected all three challenges in August and the accused filed an immediate appeal.

Meanwhile, the Secretary-General today appointed Fouad Abdel-Moneim Riad as a Judge of the International Tribunal. Mr. Riad, an Egyptian national, will serve the remainder of the term of office of Judge George Abi-Saab, who resigned to resume his academic activities.

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The Co-Chairman of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, Thorvald Stoltenberg, and the United States Ambassador to Croatia, Peter Galbraith, have invited representatives of the Croatian Government and the local Serb authorities to a meeting tomorrow to discuss the question of Sector East. The meeting will take place at the United Nations headquarters in Erdut. The Croat delegation will be led by Hrvoje Sarinic, while the Serb delegation will be led by Milan Milanovic.

In a related development, United States mediator Richard Holbrooke met with Croatian President Franjo Tudjman over the weekend. Mr. Holbrooke was quoted as saying that efforts to solve the dispute over Sector East had reached a critical point, and that a peaceful reintegration of the Serb-held territory into Croatia should be the solution. However, Croatia had not shifted from the position that it would regain Sector East by force if necessary.

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The fight against international terrorism should be carried out in conformity with international law, the representative of Spain told the Sixth Committee (Legal) this morning as it began its consideration of measures to eliminate international terrorism. Speaking on behalf of the European Union, D. Jorge Sanchez encouraged the widest possible participation of States in international instruments condemning terrorism. He also stressed the need for cooperation in relation to extradition and the exchange of information on terrorism.

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